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Get a Job. Wash Your Hands.

States rally for food safety.

The numbers are perplexing especially since the solutions seem so simple. Studies say that 97 percent of foodborne illness could be avoided simply by improving food handling practices at home and in restaurants. Up to 60 percent of cases are traceable to retail food services. Get a job. Wash your hands. These two parental cliches explain most of the problem. Lots of people heeded the former and ignored the latter. The restaurant and fast food industry employs 3.2 million people. More than half our meals are eaten away from home. The entry level salaries and high turnover rate make it difficult and expensive for employers to maintain food training programs for their workers.

About 9,000 people die of food poisoning each year, and as many as 33 million Americans suffer foodborne illness. State government and Land-Grant universities are forming partnerships to train and educate people in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points, or HACCP. Many of the following programs integrate HACCP principles with basic food safety and nutrition.

Payoff

- **Helping those who help others.** A food safety program at **Purdue** provided training to the 275 community-based emergency food organizations that serve 240,000 meals per month. About 3 million people in the United States are homeless and rely on soup kitchens and food banks for food. **Cornell** is working with New York City's 640 soup kitchens training volunteers in food safety and handling issues.
- **Start 'em young.** About 75 percent of the cases of diarrheal diseases at child care centers could be prevented just with proper hand washing. **Louisiana State** Extension's "Hooray for Hand Washing" program reached 30,000 Louisiana elementary students, 2,100 day care providers, helped license 900 day care

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workers and also trained thousands of festival and fair food vendors. **Missouri** Extension educators used the "Don't Eat Worms or Germs" campaign to teach 300 kindergartners proper hand washing techniques.

Oregon State's "We Wish You Well" reached 1,200 childcare providers.

- **Fast, friendly and safe service.** **Mississippi State** Extension worked with the Mississippi Department of Health to develop the ServSafe education program, helping 80 percent of 3,000 food service managers to pass a state-mandated food safety certification. **Pennsylvania** will also require food safety certification by 2000 and **Penn State** is gearing up to offer this training as well. **South Dakota's** ServSafe Certification program works with daycare providers, health care facilities and restaurants. **Wyoming's** advanced "Going for the Gold" program taught food safety skills to state fair food vendors and high school students interested in restaurant work. The basic "Going for the Gold" course taught hand washing in elementary schools. More than 95 percent of both groups graduated with increased food safety knowledge.

- **Building community.** **Georgia's** food safety and nutrition program included a shared gardening program that not only improved the nutritional quality of the participants but created a sense of community in this low income neighborhood.

- **Serving those who serve food,** **Tennessee** Extension's work with 331,000 food service workers increased the workers' knowledge of food safety by 57 percent. Food inspection scores have also increased across the state. The Utah Restaurant Association estimates 1.3 million meals are served daily in Salt Lake County. **Utah State** Extension food safety programs have helped reduce the number of Hepatitis A food poisonings in Salt Lake County from 677 in 1996 to 225 in 1997. During the same period, Salmonella cases dropped from 170 to 100.

- **Cooking up safe traditions.** In **Washington**, 90 cases of food poisoning were linked to a traditional home-made cheese called queso fresco. This traditional food, popular with the Hispanic community, is usually made from raw, unpasteurized milk. **Washington State** food scientists found they could easily modify the recipe so cheese makers could use pasteurized *milk*.

- **Cyber food safety.** **Florida** is reaching the world with its food safety web site (www.foodsafe.org) and CD-ROM "Let's Have a Killer Cookout...Not!" The web site data base handles 77,000 requests for information per week and is available in English or Spanish. The interactive CD-ROM is used in 300 schools across the United States to teach food handling basics. Though the site is directed by **Florida, Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina State** and **South Dakota State** are major contributors to the far-reaching project.



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